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# A STORY OF SEAL FLUSHES.

COMPONENTS OF  
JOSEPH E. LITTLE & CO., Chicago.



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CHICAGO, ILLS.

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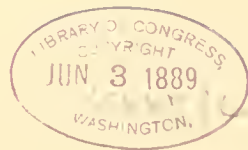
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

A Story of ———  
——— Seal Plushes.

JOSEPH BEIFELD & CO.  
CHICAGO.

2





O, Woman! since the serpent spake  
And bade thee of the apple take,  
'Twas ever man's delight and care  
That garments rich, of textures rare,  
Should grace thy form and be thy wear.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A PROBLEM IN METAL.

**I**MMEDIATELY after the great Chicago fire of 1871 and before the country had fully awakened to a realization of the awful calamity that had befallen the great Metropolis of the West, it was flooded with small bell-shaped charms which it was claimed were made from the metal of the great Court House Bell. The charms were sold at first at \$3.50 each, and though the intrinsic value could not possibly have exceeded half a cent, thousands upon thousands were sold. Each purchaser was presented with a handsomely engraved document, setting forth the facts (?) and guaranteeing that the metal used in the manufacture of the charm was obtained from the old Court House Bell. After awhile the



price was reduced to two dollars, one dollar, a quarter, and, before many weeks were passed, they were hawked on the street corners by fakirs at a dime, and still each purchaser was supplied with a guarantee, soiled and crumpled by the none too clean fingers of the vender. So plentiful did they become that, from cur to pointer, from ki-oodle to greyhound, every dog in the land soon had one attached to his neck. A well-known mathematician of this city has devoted some of his leisure hours to this problem, and has figured out that if every charm sold under the guarantee was genuine, there must have been five bells hanging in the Court House tower, each one as large as that known to have been there. Of course the authenticity of the guarantee cannot be doubted, as it was elegantly executed and printed on fine parchment paper, with a large seal, so that we are forced to the conclusion that there must have been four other bells, the existence of which was unknown except to the manufacturer of the charms.



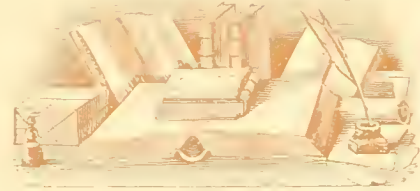


## CHAPTER II.

### HISTORICAL.



Do not smile at the credulity of the public in allowing itself to be hoodwinked by such transparent devices as that related in the foregoing chapter, but we do not stop to think how, day by day, we are imposed upon in divers ways by equally shallow dodges. History repeats itself, and the metallic paradox of '71 is today being re-enacted in countless forms.



A year ago the name of Walker was unknown to the great mass of the American people, except in connection with a certain eccentric female of uncertain age, whose only title to distinction rests upon the fact that she has discarded the ordinary costume of her sex, and persists in appearing in ill-fitting

male attire. To the patrons of dime museums this freak is known as Dr. Mary Walker. Something less than a year ago, however, the name sprang into prominence in connection with a certain make of seal plush manufactured by a firm of that name in England. Although this plush had been in the market for years, it was, by reason of certain defects in its composition, which we shall hereafter speak of, comparatively unknown and but little used by the cloak manufacturers of this country, and by the general retail trade not at all. During the closing months of 1888, however, a fortunate, or rather unfortunate, conjunction of circumstances brought this plush prominently before the trade. To correctly understand and appreciate the circumstances which contributed to this result, it will be necessary to review briefly the history of seal plushes in their relation to the cloak industry. It is now about eight years since seal plushes were first employed in the manufacture of ladies' cloaks. The writer remembers distinctly the first piece brought to his notice; it was a beautiful specimen of the fabric, all silk, high, compact pile, and closely resembling seal. The price was very high—about \$15.00 per yard, if our memory serves us—and the first sacques made from same were sold at wholesale for \$65.00, and were worth it. From the start the new material met

with favor, and cheaper grades began to appear, but several years elapsed before a decent plush sacque was wholesaled under \$40.00. As with everything else, prices continued to steadily decline from season to season under the pressure of competition, and it was not long before the plush manufacturer realized that, unless the fabric could be produced at a less figure, his occupation, like Othello's, would be gone. Up to this time no complaint had ever been made against the wearing qualities of any of the plushes in the market, but the iron hand of competition forced the manufacturer to acquire the art of producing the fabric *cheap* but without materially affecting its beauty and sightliness; this was the problem with which he was confronted, and with the inevitable result. Thus, as each succeeding season found the price of plush garments cheaper than before, so did the quality deteriorate in equal ratio. The same state of affairs which is brought about in all departments of trade and industry by the same causes produced this result. Consumers expected to obtain for \$20.00 what had formerly cost \$60.00, and were unwilling to sacrifice any portion of the beauty on the altar of durability. They wanted both, but at a price fixed by themselves, and which was wholly inadequate to defray the cost of production. Beauty they could obtain, but at the expense of

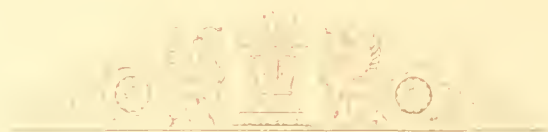
durability. *Durability* they could secure if they were willing to forego beauty, but a combination of both at the prevailing prices was impossible. A price sufficient to enable a union of the two they would not hear of. So serious did this become that many merchants boycotted plushes entirely and discontinued handling them, but the demand increased as steadily as the prices decreased, and the tide could not be stemmed. PLUSH HAD EVIDENTLY COME TO STAY.

The element of durability the Walker plush possessed; beauty it *did not* have. The manufacturers of this plush interwove with the silk an admixture of mohair in such a manner as to give durability, but destroyed the handsome appearance which is the chief charm of plush. It gave to the fabric a certain dusty and muddy cast which always militated against its success with the consumer. For years we were unremitting in our efforts to introduce the cloth, but, despite our strenuous endeavors, we met with little success. The ladies were our strongest opposition. If we succeeded in impressing upon the merchant the wear-resisting qualities of the plush and in inducing him to place it in his line, his competitor, who confined himself to the handsome, albeit

less durable makes, did the business of the town in the cloak line, and the Walker plushes hung neglected on the rack. With few exceptions, this is the history of our experience with these goods.


Season after season we lost money in our attempt to place the Walker fabrics, and became discouraged. We were met on every side with the same old cry, "What good will it do us if the garments will wear well, as long as our customers refuse to buy them? They listen patiently to our story, and then go and buy the others from our neighbors." Numbers of our customers returned them to us on account of this appearance of dust, which they imagined to be a defect. To illustrate: we made last year a \$24.00 sacque of the Lister make, of which we sold an immense number, so many, in fact, that we exhausted our supply of plush before the end of the season. Having in stock a large number of Walker plush sacques, of about the same general style, that had been made up to sell at \$28.00, we offered to substitute them for the \$24.00 grade, but few of our customers were willing to accept them, despite the fact that we descanted so earnestly on their wearing qualities. Some we sent out as substitutes on approval, and almost invariably they were returned the ladies declining to accept

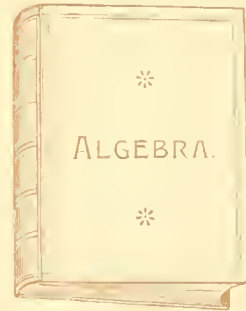
them in lieu of the other. However, towards the close of last season, by judicious advertisements of the manufacturers and a few cloak houses (ourselves among the number), the attention of the trade was forcibly directed to these plushes, and many of the country merchants, having experienced considerable trouble with inferior grades of other plush, took hold of them. In this manner the Walker plushes attained a certain popularity.



### CHAPTER III.

#### A PROBLEM IN PLUSHES.

THE Walker plushes having in this manner become known to a large number of merchants by name, without a corresponding knowledge of their appearance or characteristics, unscrupulous and dishonest people applied the name to almost anything in the shape of material that bore the slightest resemblance to plush, and the old court house bell dodge was thus repeated. It is an open secret in cloak circles that the Walker Mills in Huddersfield, England, have not sufficient capacity to produce one piece of plush for every twenty that are sold throughout the country *as its production*. Some one has said of the North American Indian that he acquires all the vices, but none of



the virtues, of the Anglo Saxon, and of these so-called Walker plushes it can similarly be said that they possess all the defects, but none of the merits of the genuine. Not one of the million and odd purchasers of those metal charms could prove that they were not in reality a chip of the old bell, nor can any of the purchasers of the Walker (?) plushes know to a certainty that they ever saw Huddersfield. Walker & Sons sell no plushes to cloak houses direct, all of their productions sold in this country being handled by New York commission merchants, so that cloak manufacturers themselves can never assert positively that they have the genuine article.





## CHAPTER IV.

### PLUSH STATISTICS.

**W**E cannot repress a smile at the popular impression which a certain Eastern cloak house has endeavored to create by means of absurd statements and florid advertisements, namely: that the Walker plushes are the best, indeed the only good, plushes in the market. The Walker firm, as compared to some other plush manufacturers, is a very small concern, and lamentable indeed would be the condition of things if this claim were true, as we doubt very much whether Walker & Sons are able to turn out one piece of seal plush out of five hundred that are used in this country. To further show the utter absurdity of these claims, we



wish to say that we sold, during the year 1888, about *seventeen thousand* plush garments, of which perhaps one twentieth were of the Walker make. Out of these seventeen thousand we have received, up to this date, complaints against not over eighty garments. In other words, more than one hundred and ninety-nine out of every two hundred sold gave satisfaction. The others, we may add, *were made satisfactory*.

We wish to say, further, that the supposition that an admixture of mohair with the silk *is all* that is necessary to insure durability is a popular error. It is the density and closeness of the pile that gives this property. Combination plushes, if loosely woven, have very poor wear resisting qualities. Mr. Joseph Beifeld has made the subject of plushes the study of years, and we cannot be charged with egotism when we state that he has the reputation among manufacturers of being one of the best judges—as he is one of the heaviest buyers—in the country, and it is his opinion, based upon the closest research and years of experience, during which period he has observed and analyzed the nature and characteristics of all kinds of plush, that an all-silk seal plush, when properly made, is fully equal, and often superior, to the best grades of combination. The secret of making good plum pudding consists largely in

putting in a sufficient quantity of good plums. The secret of making good silk plush is in putting in enough good silk. One cannot make a good oyster stew by using six oysters when a dozen are necessary, nor is it possible to make a good piece of seal plush by using one pound of silk where two are required. Stripped of all technical and high-flown language, this is the truth in a nut shell.

All students of textile fabrics, and, indeed, all well-posted dry goods merchants, know that nothing is more durable than good silk. It is only the cheap, flimsy silk that brings the article into disrepute. It is the admixture of mohair that produces in the Walker combination plushes that muddy and dusty appearance which is so strongly objected to, and which is the chief fault urged against them. Walker & Sons have thus far been unable to overcome this great defect, but other manufacturers have been more successful. "The world do move," is a favorite expression of "Brudder Gardner," and while Walker & Sons have been quietly resting on the laurels which they fancied they had won, other manufacturers have been bestirring themselves, and have succeeded in producing plushes that combine with durability, which the Walker plushes have, beauty and sightliness, which the Walker plushes *have not*, so that the

merchants who last year handled the Walker plushes, and this year refrain from doing so, are in very much the position of the man who, on being asked why he had expressed a different opinion today from that of yesterday, gave as his answer, "I am twenty-four hours older." Progress and improvement are the ruling spirits of the age.

Prominent among these wide awake makers of plush are Sir Titus Salt, Bart., Sons & Co., of the Saltaire Mills, Bradford, England. This firm is known throughout the mercantile world, and its name is the synonym for financial strength and commercial probity. They *have* produced a plush possessing the qualities above named, and despite the impudent and bombastic statements of a certain New York corporation engaged in the manufacture of cloaks, we desire to make it known that we are the owners of a very large quantity of these plushes, at prices as low as have been secured by any house in America. We challenge any firm in the United States to prove to the contrary, and we hereby agree to donate the sum of One Thousand Dollars (\$1,000.00) to the charitable organizations of this city if we fail to make good this claim, provided the other party will agree to the same in the event of their failure to substantiate their assertion.

Another concern that has distanced Walker in the race for supremacy is the well-known firm of Lister & Co., of Bradford, England. We give here the full text of a recent communication received from them, which will explain itself.

(SEE NEXT PAGE.)

MEMORANDUM.

Charles W. O'Donnell.

Sept. 1889.

Dear Sir,

Since the completion of our new Commission we have been hard at work to find out some more values in the Salt Glue which can be thoroughly relied upon as durability and value.

As this we think we have been most successfully and after many experiments we have adopted three distinct new values.

The Manufacture, Packing and Finishing of these goods are entirely different from any previously introduced, and the new treatment is altogether superior and character of the Salt is retained.

We have now three qualities of goods:

LISTER & CO. Ltd.	{	"The Hard Wear."
		"The Exhibition 1889."
		"The Patent Elastic Indestructible."

The special feature of each kind of cloth described above:

THE HARD WEAR consists of a close, short warp, giving great durability and resistance.

THE EXHIBITION 1889 is a 12-rip, fine fabric, with particularly strong fibers of improved durability and special resistance to dirt and lustre, which is obtained by a new system of dyeing and finishing.

THE PATENT ELASTIC INDESTRUCTIBLE consists of an article which could not be better described than by the name: it is beautiful and close in appearance, not liable to crush and especially adapted for close, well-fitting garments, while in wear it is indestructible.

We can with the utmost confidence recommend all the above and all AS SUPERIOR to any in the market.

Yours obediently,

**LISTER & CO. Ltd.**

Lister & Co. are the oldest and largest producers of seal plush on the face of the earth. Their wealth is almost boundless, and their reputation for sterling integrity beyond the breath of suspicion. An announcement of this kind, coming from a firm of such standing, cannot fail to carry conviction. When we assert that Lister & Co. produce twenty-five pieces of seal plush to one of Joseph Walker & Sons, we underestimate, rather than overstate the facts. We are heavy purchasers of these plushes at extremely low prices, and we know them to be *far superior in many and equal in all* respects to the highest grades of Walker plushes. We have also contracted for a large quantity of the plushes of Messrs. T. Priestly & Co., Bradford, England. This firm is not, perhaps, as large as the two above mentioned, but it is universally conceded that they are among the most reliable and expert makers of seal plush, and to the excellent qualities of the goods produced by them this year our own experience enables us to testify.



## CHAPTER V.

### DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES.



WE do not claim that we are the only cloak house handling these plushes, nor do we wish to be understood as saying that these are the only good plushes in the market. There are a number of other first-class and reliable makers whose productions we handle, and which we can conscientiously recommend. The world is too large for any one man to have a monopoly of everything that is good.

We have this year confined our purchases to such plushes as we knew to be reliable. We have avoided all that have given any trouble in the past, and shall adhere to the use of



those which have proven their durability in former seasons, adopting only such new fabrics as give positive assurance, by their nature and composition, of their ability to resist the ravages of hard wear. Of course, despite the utmost care and circumspection, no matter whose plushes are used (Walker's not excepted), now and then a garment will succumb to usage before its time, and in such cases we have always stood by our customers, and shall continue to do so in future. We have never, to our knowledge, lost a single customer on this account, and every reasonable claim has always been satisfactorily adjusted. This policy and these methods have made us the leading cloak house in the West, and will continue to be employed by us as heretofore. In view of the fact that the corporation before referred to has announced, among other misstatements, in language more conspicuous for its bombast than its elegance of diction or correctness of grammar, that it was the only house that was able to secure the Walker plushes at last year's prices, we desire, before concluding, to make public the following extract from a letter received by us from a firm that handles only the Walker plushes, under date of March 19, 1889:   \* \* \* \* \* *I will sell fifty or one hundred pieces to you at last year's order price (not less than fifty pieces), terms on all*

*taken prior to July 1, ninety days, after July 1, sixty days. \* \* \* Geo. T. Knight.*

The following was our reply: "*Chicago, March 22, 1889. George T. Knight, Esq., New York. Dear Sir: The cloth referred to in yours of the 19th inst. does not interest us.*"

We declined to purchase these Walker plushes at last year's prices, despite the fact that they had already been advanced, simply because WE OWN BETTER AND HANDSOMER GOODS FOR LESS MONEY. We do not pay for name. A good cigar is good, even if it is not wrapped in tin foil and branded with a high sounding name. We know a plush when we see it, whether it is made by Walker, Jumper or Runner, and we are willing to stake our reputation on our judgment.







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